## Unit .16

## Bonus Session

# Immanuel, God with Us

### Scripture

## Matthew 1:18-25

**18** The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way:
After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it
was discovered before they came together that she was
pregnant from the Holy Spirit. **19** So her husband
Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to
disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.
**20** But after he had considered these things, an angel
of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,
"Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary
as your wife, because what has been conceived in
her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth
to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he
will save his people from their sins." **22** Now all this
took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord
through the prophet: **23** See, the virgin will become
pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name
him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."
**24** When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel
had commanded him. He married her **25** but did not
have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a
son. And he named him Jesus.

## Intro Options

**Main Point:**
**The gift of Christmas is the promise of God's presence.**

## Option 1

Imagine you had to spend the rest of your life chained to someone else; you are connected by ankle-cuffs with a long chain (about thirty feet). So you have some limited freedom, but you still have to be pretty doggone close to that person for decades. Literally nothing but death will separate you (pretend the chains are made of vibranium or adamantium or some other unbreakable material). To whom would you want to be chained? It could be anyone in the world. Why this person?

Expand the possibilities now: if they could choose anyone from any period of history, or any person, real or imaginary (e.g., a movie character), would they change whom they would pick? Why?

After students have shared their answers, ask them how they would feel about being chained to Jesus for the rest of their lives. What would be good about it? What would be bad about it?

Having God with us would be (and is!) absolutely fantastic. He's there to comfort us when we need it; to confront us when we need it; to protect us when we need it; the meet our every need and be our never-failing friend. Nothing could be better. So the promise of Christmas, that God will dwell with His people, is flabbergastingly amazing; our over-familiarity with the very idea of God Himself being "chained" to us blinds us to the enormity and glory of it.

## Option 2

Lateral thinking riddles are riddles where you, the facilitator, offer a short scenario, and the group has to figure out the larger story by asking yes or no questions. While you can find several online, one could start with the following to tell to the students, "A woman walks outside in the middle of summer with two coats on. Why?" The explanation is that the two coats are coats of paint; she's been painting rooms in a building. Look up a few online and try them out with your students.

The point behind these riddles is that there are assumptions we make when we hear something (e.g., that the coats are made of fabric); the riddle overcomes these assumptions. We also all-too-often have assumptions about how God works; Christmas is all about God breaking those assumptions in amazing, glorious ways. In today's lesson, we'll particularly see how God breaks the assumption that a virgin couldn't give birth and, even more importantly, that God Himself could become man and choose to dwell among us.

# TEACHING PLAN

## Read Matthew 1:18-21.

The apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily for a Jewish audience in the first century, challenging them, and us, with this question: What will you do with Jesus of Nazareth? From the outset, Matthew was proving his point—Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the promised King of Israel to bless all the peoples of the earth (Matt. 1:1-17; Gen. 12:3; 2 Sam. 7:11-16).

The Christ's birth story, however, began with a scandal, or so it appeared. Matthew's opening genealogy made it plain that Joseph did not "father" Jesus (Matt. 1:16). Mary was engaged to Joseph but was found to be pregnant before they ever had sexual relations at the conclusion of their betrothal period. So Joseph naturally assumed that Mary had been unfaithful and adulterous.

This left Joseph in a great dilemma. Joseph did not yet understand that Mary's pregnancy was not a result of adultery but a miraculous conception through the agency of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, Mary. Unlike everyone in His genealogy, Jesus was not born through a natural conception. Our sinless Savior's miraculous conception was as profoundly unique as He is.

While the details of Jesus' miraculous conception are vague, its reality cannot be denied without a host of important beliefs tumbling down around it, like removing the bottom piece of a balanced block tower. If Jesus were conceived by normal means with a human mother and father—not through the Holy Spirit—then He would have been only human and not the God-man we need. If He were only human and not also God, then He couldn't have lived a sinless life (Ps. 14:2-3). If He couldn't live a sinless life, then He couldn't die on the cross as our righteous substitute (Ps. 65:3). If He couldn't pay the penalty for our sins as a sinless Savior, then we are lost with no hope of a righteous standing before God (Isa. 53:4-12).

- **In your own words, how would you explain to someone the importance of the virgin birth?**

## Read Matthew 1:22-23.

Matthew unveiled a divinely orchestrated parallel between the immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a boy named Immanuel born to a young woman and the future fulfillment of Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary. The immediate fulfillment entailed a young woman conceiving a son through natural means, but the complete fulfillment entailed an actual virgin conceiving a son through supernatural means. The immediate fulfillment of the prophecy ensured military salvation for Judah, but the complete fulfillment ensured the spiritual salvation of God's people. Matthew highlighted this prophecy to drive home his point: Jesus is the promised Christ, the fulfillment of Israel's expectation.

The details surrounding Jesus' birth not only prove His identity, they also remind us of the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God and His Word. Jesus was born to fulfill Old Testament prophecy that God would provide a way to dwell with His people. If God has kept His numerous promises to Israel by sending the Christ, won't He also keep His numerous promises to us now?

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**The gift of Christmas is the promise of God's presence.**

## Matthew 1

**18-21.** It took God's intervention through an angel to clarify for Joseph the uniqueness and glory of Jesus' conception, because while God had foreshadowed it in the Scriptures, nothing in human experience can prepare one for this miracle.

The angel addressed Joseph as a "son of David," a nod to Joseph's royal lineage, through which the promised Christ would come. God, who knows the depths of our hearts, spoke directly to Joseph's fear. The angel told him to marry Mary because her baby was not conceived out of sin but through the Holy Spirit. Through this marriage, Joseph assumed legal fatherhood for the child and bore responsibility for naming Him. Therefore, the baby to be born of the virgin was indeed the promised "Son of David."

The name Jesus is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation." Yahweh is the personal, covenant name of God that He revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Mary's son was named Jesus, not simply as an acknowledgment that Yahweh is the Savior of His people but because Jesus Himself would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). So does Yahweh save or does Jesus save? The answer is yes and yes because Jesus is Yahweh, the sinless Savior of sinful people.

Jesus' very name communicated His mission: to save people from their sins. This primary purpose of Jesus' coming was not what many Jews expected of the Christ. Many were anticipating the Christ to free Israel from their Roman oppressors and establish the military and political dominance they had enjoyed in the time of King David and King Solomon. Jesus' revolution, however, would be focused on the greatest need of all humans at all times—freedom from the sin that separates us from God.

## 99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

### Virgin Birth

The Bible affirms that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). The virgin birth affirms the historicity of the incarnation, where the eternal Son of God took on human flesh. The virgin birth is significant in that it serves as a reminder of Old Testament prophecies (Isa. 7) while also affirming both the deity and humanity of Christ.

# TEACHING PLAN

- **How have you seen God keep His promises in your life or in the life of someone you know?**

Matthew proclaimed that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. The claim that Jesus is God greatly offended many of His Jewish contemporaries and contributed to His path to the cross (John 5:18; Matt. 26:62-66). Yet Matthew boldly asserted this truth as a fulfillment of Scripture.

The events surrounding Jesus' birth lined up with Isaiah's prophecy. The name He was given means "Yahweh is salvation." The purpose of Jesus' name—that He would save His people from their sins—implied that He, indeed, is Yahweh. Understanding this divine implication, Matthew applied the name "Immanuel" to Jesus as a title that people would call Him. Jesus is God in the flesh who came to dwell with His people and save us from our sin.

- **Why is God's presence with His people such an encouragement?**

**Read Matthew 1:24-25.**

We may like to think that if an angel of the Lord spoke to us, we'd immediately obey like Joseph. But how often are we fully aware of what God has commanded us in His Word and yet still choose to disobey? How often do we come up with a list of excuses about why we didn't do what God tells us to do in His Word?

Obedience to God is an act of faith. When we distrust God's goodness, wisdom, power, and authority, we aren't inclined to do what He says. But when we are convinced that God is good enough, gracious enough, and powerful enough to both command what He wants and empower us to do what He wants, we're compelled to obey. Our obedience or disobedience to God communicates whether or not we believe He is trustworthy.

- **What are some ways you are struggling to obey God?**
- **What are some Scripture passages that speak directly to that sin and encourage faith in God?**

Joseph is a model of faith for us. But could he ever have imagined the significance of his faith-driven obedience? He was a man from a no-name town who simply sought to pattern his life after God's word. Yet this is the very kind of person God delights to use in great ways for His glory.

If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then you can trust that every single step of obedience you take is well worth it. The God who used Joseph in the coming of Immanuel is the same God who is eager to use you for His eternal purposes as you daily yield to His Word in faith and obedience.

- **How does the promise of Jesus encourage you to walk in faithful obedience this week? What might this look like in your day to day life?**

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**The gift of Christmas is the promise of God's presence.**

## Matthew 1

**24-25.** There is only one God, and He has forever existed in three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. The triune (three-in-one) nature of God is a reality taught throughout the Bible, but it is not something we can fully wrap our minds around. Likewise, the miraculous incarnation of Christ—when God the Son took on a human nature through the work of the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary's womb—is a reality we can't completely grasp. Jesus is one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man! He is the only Man worthy of our worship.

The attitude of Jesus should both humble and encourage us (Phil. 2:5-8). The all-powerful Creator of the universe humbled Himself by putting on human flesh. He lived in submission to God the Father through prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, and obedience rather than simply flexing His abilities as God. He easily could have executed His opposition, but instead, He loved, served, and laid His life down for His enemies. Only Immanuel, God with us, could exercise such unbelievable patience.

### Activity

Sometimes comics have alternate universes or alternate story lines. Your students are going to make comics or skits of an alternate reality where Joseph does not obey the angel; imagine he leaves Mary quietly. Students should draw a comic or make a skit showing what would unfold in the lives of Joseph and/or Mary and Jesus. What would have happened if Joseph disobeyed?

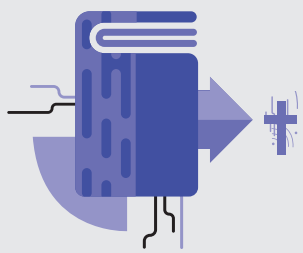
Give them time to prepare their skits or comics and then to share them. See if the students have anything bad happening to Joseph. Does Jesus still get born and raised by Mary?

Suggest that God's will is always accomplished regardless of our obedience or not. The only person who really stands to lose is us for disobeying; in the same way, had Joseph disobeyed, Jesus still would have been born, but Joseph would have missed out.

Give students index cards or sticky notes. Ask them to write down at least one area where God is calling them to obey. Be as specific as possible: perhaps they need to obey the command to share Jesus with a friend, or they need to be more honoring to their parents, or they need to repent of some petty theft. Point out that God's will will be done whether they obey or not; how will they miss out on a blessing if they disobey? How might God bring blessing to them, as He did with Joseph, if they obey in faith? Pray with them that the Holy Spirit would give them courage to walk by faith in whatever they wrote on their index card.

## (p. 34, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and to affirm that He is the sinless Savior—God in the flesh who came to dwell with people and save us from our sin.



# SPECIAL LESSON 4: COMPASSION
# IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US

Matthew 1:18–25

## IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US

The gift of Christmas is the promise of God's presence.

## JESUS CONNECTION

Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary to fulfill Old Testament prophecy and to affirm that He is the sinless Savior—God in the flesh who came to dwell with people and save us from our sin.

## LIFEWISE QUALITY

COMPASSION – Recognizing the suffering of others and taking action to help.

## HEAD

What did the angel tell Joseph to do about Mary?

What does the name *Immanuel* mean?

## HEART

Joseph faced a hard choice between doing what he thought was right and wanting to protect Mary. How did he show compassion before and after the angel spoke to him?

Immanuel means "God with us." How does Jesus coming to Earth and living a fully human life (one without sin) demonstrate God's compassion for us?

## HANDS

Suffering is a part of life, but it is easier to face when someone bears it with us. Think of someone who might be hurting or struggling with loneliness, physical illness or pain, a recent loss or another hard situation. Pray for them and write them a note or call them this week to encourage or offer to help them.